

BAB EDH-DHRA', NUMEIRA, AND THE BIBLICAL PATRIARCHS: A CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY

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Problem

Bab edh-Dhra' and Numeira have been identified by archaeologists as possible candidates for two of the biblical cities of the plain, but their existence in the Early Bronze Age III is too early to match the biblical narrative (Genesis 19) by many chronologies of ancient Canaan. This study sought to determine if there is sufficient flexibility in the archaeological and biblical chronologies to make the identification of Bab edh-Dhra' and Numeira with the cities of the plain a viable interpretation.

Method

The range of dates possible for both the archaeological data and the biblical narratives was analyzed. For the archaeological data, this involved a study of the absolute dates for contemporary periods in Mesopotamia and Egypt, with particular emphasis on the trends in dating for both areas over the last century or so, as well as a study of radiocarbon dating in the region for this time period. For the biblical narratives, the study consisted of a review of the spectrum of absolute dates that have been suggested for the patriarchs. The results of these two data sets were then compared for possible overlap.

Results

Chronologies for both Mesopotamia and Egypt have been steadily lowered over the past century, and it is not clear that the trend is over. This trend has not yet been fully embraced by mainstream archaeology in Syria/Palestine. Radiocarbon was found to generally favor higher dates, but the method has problems that render it inconclusive by itself. The absolute dates possible for the patriarchs span a lengthy period, the early end of which may overlap the newer low chronologies for Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Conclusion

Combining the new lower archaeological chronologies and the higher dates for the patriarchs indicates the possibility that Bab edh-Dhra' and Numeira could be two of the biblical cities of the plain. Further investigation into this possible identification is merited.